

## Appendix G -- INSTRUCTIONS ON SPLITS

### Problems regarding the implementation of determinate sentences in the District of Columbia June 15, 2002

Dear Judges, Assistant United States Attorneys and members of the Defense Bar:

It has come to our attention that there is still some confusion with respect to the “new” determinate sentencing system. We write this memo to help clarify a few aspects of the system that seem to be the most confounding.

#### Calculating maximum prison time for non-Class A felonies

In the new determinate sentencing system [“new system”], there are two classes of felonies: Class A felonies and everything else. With the exception of armed carjacking, all of the Class A felonies carried a maximum penalty of life in the old indeterminate sentencing system [“old system”].<sup>17</sup> All other felonies carried a maximum penalty of a term of years in the old system.

The distinction between Class A felonies and all other felonies determines, among other things, the maximum sentence the court can impose. For Class A felonies, the court can impose any sentence up to the statutory maximum sentence. For all other felonies, the court must deduct from the statutory maximum sentence the additional prison time that could be imposed (by the U.S. Parole Commission) if supervised release were to be revoked [“back up time”]. Keep in mind that back up time is not the same as the term of supervised release.

The total amount of time a person could serve in prison following revocation of supervised release is set out in column two of the following chart:

<b>If the statutory maximum for the offense is</b>	<b>Then the maximum amount of imprisonment following revocation of supervised release [“back up time”] is</b>
Life or the offense is specifically designated as a “Class A” felony	5 years
25 years or more, but less than life	3 years
5 years or more, but less than 25 years	2 years
Less than 5 years	1 year

In order to figure out the maximum prison sentence the court can impose, one should first determine what the statutory maximum for the offense is and then, for non-Class A felonies, deduct the amount of back up time from the statutory maximum. The balance is the maximum prison sentence the court can impose.

Thus, for example, aggravated assault has a statutory maximum penalty of 10 years. The back up time for aggravated assault is 2 years because the statutory maximum is more than 5 years but less than 25 years. Therefore, the maximum amount of prison time that the court can impose on the defendant on the day of sentencing is 8 years (the 10-year statutory maximum minus 2 years

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<sup>17</sup>Class A felonies are: first and second degree murder, first degree sexual abuse, first degree child sexual abuse, kidnapping, armed carjacking, obstruction of justice, armed crimes of violence as defined in D.C. Code § 22-4501(f)(2001), the third conviction for a felony, and the third conviction for a violent felony.

of back up time). The worst case scenario for this defendant (from his or her point of view) is that the court imposes the maximum prison sentence of 8 years and then the defendant violates his/her subsequent supervised release and gets revoked by the United States Parole Commission for the entire 2 years. Even in this worst case scenario, the defendant cannot be legally imprisoned even one day more than the 10 year statutory maximum, which was the intent behind requiring the subtraction of the back up time.

Remember that subtracting the back up time from the statutory maximum to arrive at the maximum prison sentence that can be imposed is required for all felonies except Class A felonies.

Subtracting the back up time from the statutory maximum is the only way to arrive at the correct maximum prison sentence and the calculation is mandatory. A sentence greater than the statutory maximum minus the back up times is not a legal sentence. Thus, for example, assault on a police officer has a 5-year statutory maximum. The maximum prison sentence is therefore 3 years (the 5 year statutory maximum minus the 2 year back up time). The court cannot legally impose a prison sentence of 4 years or 5 years, even if the court suspends the sentence and places the defendant on probation.

For Class A felonies, the back up time is not subtracted from the statutory maximum. For example, aggravated assault while armed is a Class A felony and its statutory maximum penalty is now 30 years. While the back up term is 5 years, this term is not subtracted from the statutory maximum to arrive at the maximum prison sentence the court can impose. The maximum prison sentence the court can impose is the statutory maximum; thus, the judge can impose a sentence of up to 30 years.

The court may not impose a prison term greater than the statutory maximum for Class A felonies or the statutory maximum *minus* back-up time for all other felonies. The court is always free to impose less prison time, keeping in mind any applicable mandatory minimums. Once the court imposes its sentence, the defendant will serve at least 85% of it according to “truth-in-sentencing” principles. The defendant can earn good time to reduce his or her sentence, but s/he cannot reduce the sentence by more than 15%. As in the old system, the United States Bureau of Prisons, and not the court, administers the award of good time credits.

Finally, the amount of back up time for any given offense is set by D.C. Official Code § 24.403.1(b)(7). It is not a part of the sentence imposed by the judge. If the U.S. Parole Commission revokes supervised release, it can impose all or part of the back up time. If the Parole Commission imposes only part of the back up time, the balance is still available if the Parole Commission places the defendant on supervised release again in that case and it is again revoked.

### Split sentences

Split sentences continue to pose problems in the new regime. A split sentence must have these elements: an imposed prison sentence, an imposed period of supervised release, suspension of some, but not all, of the prison time, suspension of all of the supervised release term and a period of probation, not to exceed 5 years, to follow release from the unsuspended portion of the prison time.

To impose a legal split sentence, the court should impose the prison sentence it wants the defendant to serve if probation is later revoked and impose the amount of supervised release that it must impose with that prison sentence. Then the court should suspend the amount of prison time it wants to suspend and suspend all the supervised release time. The court should then set an appropriate term of probation. The court must impose a term of supervised release because the law says that every felony sentence must be followed by an adequate period of supervised release. The court must suspend the imposed term of supervised release when it is imposing a split sentence because the felony sentence will not be completely served and the supervised release will not begin unless and until probation is revoked and the defendant serves the unsuspended portion of the original prison sentence (or some lesser sentence, if the judge chooses to reduce it upon

revocation).<sup>18</sup> If the supervised release were not suspended, it would run concurrently with the probation and the court and the United States Parole Commission would both have jurisdiction in the same case at the same time. If the defendant violated, for example by testing positive for drugs, then anomalous results could occur with the judge deciding not to revoke probation but to order the defendant into an inpatient treatment program and the United States Parole Commission deciding to revoke supervised release and to send the defendant to prison.

An example of a legal split sentence in an aggravated assault case is “6 years in prison to be followed by 3 years supervised release, suspend all but 2 years in prison to be followed by 4 years probation.” In this example, the defendant will serve 2 years in prison and then be released to do 4 years of probation. If the defendant is successful on probation, then the defendant will never serve the remainder of the prison sentence (the 4 years s/he did not serve of the 6 year imposed sentence) and s/he will never serve the term of supervised release. If the defendant is unsuccessful and the court revokes probation, then the defendant will serve the remainder of the prison sentence (or less, if the court chooses) and, once s/he is released from prison, the defendant will serve the 3-year term of supervised release.

When calculating a split sentence, the initial prison sentence that the court imposes cannot be greater than the maximum prison sentence allowed for the offense. Splitting a sentence does not change the rules for how the maximum prison sentence must be calculated for non-Class A felonies. In the earlier example, we noted that a sentence of 4 years on a conviction of APO is illegal. It is similarly illegal to impose a sentence of 4 years, followed by a 3-year term of supervised release, suspend all but 1 year, followed by probation for 2 years. In this example, the defendant would initially serve only one year, but if the probation were later revoked, s/he could serve the remainder of the 4-year prison term imposed and then be subject to 2 years of back up time if s/he violates the conditions of his/her 3-year term of supervised release. This means that defendant could be required to serve 6 years in prison -- which is more than the 5-year statutory maximum. As discussed above, a defendant cannot be made to serve more time in prison than the statutory maximum penalty for that offense.

#### Minimum sentences (robbery)

Robbery is probably the most common offense for which there is a statutory minimum but there are others, including first and second degree burglary (5 years and 2 years, respectively) and second degree murder (20 years). See attached chart. Using robbery as an example, according to D.C. Official Code § 22-2801, the penalty for robbery is “not less than 2 years nor more than 15-years.” This language does not create a mandatory minimum, and probation is a possibility on a robbery conviction. However, if the court imposes a prison sentence, then the court must impose a sentence between 2 years (the statutory minimum) and 13 years (15 year statutory maximum minus 2 years back up time). If the judge wants to impose a prison sentence but does not want the defendant to serve 2 years, there are at least two options. The court could impose a split sentence: impose a sentence of 2 years to be followed by a 3-year term supervised release, suspend all but the amount of prison time the court wants the defendant to serve and impose a period of probation. If the court wants the defendant to serve 1 year or less, then the court can either suspend imposition of sentence (ISS) or impose a sentence and suspend execution of all of it (ESS), place the defendant on probation for any period up to 5 years, and require the defendant, as a condition of probation, to spend up to one year in custody, either at the D.C. Jail or at a halfway house. D.C. Code § 16-710(b-1)(2001, 2002 interim update service). These options are available for any offense that has a minimum that is not a mandatory minimum.

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<sup>18</sup>Some believe that the court can, when splitting a sentence, suspend imposition of supervised release and impose the term of supervised release if and when probation is revoked. The majority view is that the term of supervised release must be imposed when the initial sentence is imposed, but that it must be suspended when all or part of the prison sentence is suspended and the defendant is placed on probation

## Special Problems of Multiplication and Division

The statutory maximums for some felonies are tied to statutory maximums for other felonies, which can create some complications. The period of supervised release, the back up time, and the prison sentence that can be imposed are tied to the statutory maximum sentence for the offense of conviction and not to a percentage of time for the underlying offense. For example, a person convicted of accessory after the fact faces a maximum sentence up to one-half the maximum imprisonment to which the principal is subject. If the underlying offense is aggravated assault, the defendant would face a 5-year statutory maximum because 5 years is half of the 10-year statutory maximum for aggravated assault. However, even though the maximum prison time the court can impose for aggravated assault is 8 years (10 year statutory maximum minus 2 year back up time), the most prison time the court can impose on the defendant convicted of accessory after the fact (aggravated assault) is not 4 years, but 3 years (5 year statutory maximum minus 2 years of back up time). The period of supervised release is not 1 ½ years but 3 years (since the sentence for accessory after the fact, like the sentence for aggravated assault, is less than 25 years).

Offenses that enhance a sentence based on a percentage of another offense are calculated similarly. For example, a person convicted of a crime in a case in which repeat papers have been filed pursuant to § 22-1804 faces a maximum sentence of 1 ½ times the underlying offense penalty for a second conviction and 3 times the underlying offense penalty for a third or subsequent conviction. A defendant convicted a second time for aggravated assault with repeat papers is facing a 15-year statutory maximum (10-year statutory maximum times 1 ½) and, for a third or subsequent conviction, the defendant is facing a 30-year statutory maximum (10 years times 3). Again, even though the maximum prison time the court can impose for aggravated assault is 8 years, the most prison time the court can impose for a third conviction of aggravated assault with repeat papers is not 24 years, but 27 years (30 year statutory maximum minus 3 year back up time). Since the maximum prison sentence is greater than 25 years, the period of supervised release is not 4 ½ years, but 5 years.

We trust that this review of rules and principles will be helpful to everyone as we all struggle through implementation of the new system.